

[Mr. George Ogden]

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Life History? ?

FOLKLORE.

Miss Effie Cowan P.W.

McLennan County, Texas,

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REFERENCE.

Interview with Mr Geroge Ogden, White Pioneer, Marlin. Texas.

"I was born in the year 1852 in the state of Iowa. I was 13 years old when the war between the states closed. At the age of 18 years I left my home in Iowa and came south to the state of Mississippi Mississippi . Two years later came to Texas where I have resided with the exception of 12 years which I spent in Mexico. The story of my adventures and trips south may be interesting , therefore will do my best to tell you just as it really haened happened .

"My parents were farmers and we lived where the tall corn grows as well as other fine crops. But the spirit of adventure called me and I answered it as so many others have done. It was all so thrilling from the time I left my home in Iowa until many years later in life

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when the country had become settled and then it was like any other old settle country in Texas.

“There were labor agents in those days who hired the young men to go to other states to work. I joined with a construction company, and first worked on the building of a railroad in Minnesota, worked with this company until I had saved enough to travel, then three of us young men built a skiff and came down the Black river to the Mississippi Mississippi at LaCrosse , Wisconsin. We camped the first night on the banks of the river tied our skiff to a telegraph pole and while we slept the river rose and carried our boal boat away, leaving us again on foot, so we wated walked over to Louisiana , Mouourri Mosouri , and took a boat on the Mississippi down to St Louis, C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 “From St Louis we went to Iron Mountain , Missouri where we worked on a railroad which was being built to the iron mines. After again working long enough for a stake we started again and walked on the turnpike by way of St Geneva to the Mississippi Mississippi where, took a river boat down to Vicksburg in the winter of 1870.

“I must pause and tell you a little of these old towns, St Geneva, and Kaskaskia were old French town which the early French settlers had located. They were the oldest French towns and settled about the year 1683 or 1686 on the east bank of the river, about 75 and 80 miles south of St. Louis, there were to us rich in historical lore, for as we travelled we made a study of the historical towns we passed through.

“But I am digressing from my trip down the river. When we reached the city of Vicksburg I was surprised to see the canon which was used during the Civil War , mounted on old trucks facing the river, just as they were during the siege of the city by General Grants army. Vicksburg had one main street overlooking the river, called Washington street. The streets which ran paralell parallel with the river were being improved and they were cutting streets in the bluff they ere brining out great quantities of unexpoded unexploded shells from the canon which had been fired during the war, from Grants army across the river. These shells had sunk so deep in the earth they had never exploded. While just over

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the bluff on the descent from the river where the Confederates were entrenched in dug-outs and broke thro' the Union lines and retreated [?] the Yazoo river, which emptied in the Mississippi , just above Vicksburg, were the mounds where the [India?] 3 lived before the coming of the white man, where the Confederates made [thei?] last stand and were defeated. There were hugge huge forests and a few plantations left from the days of ante-bellum, here I [orked?] for some months helping to cut the forest trees for fuel for the Mississippi river steamboats. We were transported to and from our work by barges up the [Yazee?] river.

"Many river steam boats passed the city both alrge large and small, there was [ythe?] atches Watches , the Robert E. Lee, the America, the Poydars and others. Some of those were amil mail boats and passed thro' the city every day on their way to New Orleans. Sometimes I would go to the steamboat landings and wait for these mail boats to come in. When they came round the bend of the river, the boats ' whistle would sound loud and clear, I would experience a thrill such as I have never had since. As the boat came nearer, men on the decks could be seen, the negro roust-a-bouts, lying on the cotton bales. The men in the pilot house and the captain would appear on the upper deck and wave a salute to the watchers on the river bank.

"Then the ships crew would go ashore and congregate at the bar, sitting around or standing, smoking, telling stories of the high water, discussing the price of cotton and suger and such talk of the day, a hundred different things. These river boats were noted for the excellent food, they served in courses on special occasions, such as for the dances which were often held as the boat came into the towns and tarried long enough, these courses consisted of a cock-tail, a relish soup, fish, meat course, dessert, ice cream and coffee. 4 "In the afternoon the negro-roust-a bouts, as we called them, would lie around on the lower decks, but when the boat reached a landing they would come alive and carry bundles ashore for the passengers or the crew / just as the red caps of the railroads do today at the stations they usually sang the negro tunes, such as, "White man live in a big

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brick house, Nigger try to do same, Nigger lay up in de county jail, but hit a brick house jes de same.

"In memories page I can see them now as they sang and danced on the boat docks, as the stars came out and the boat nosed its way down stream on the Mississippi Mississippi river. The sun would set in its reddish glow and the twilight settled down as the color faded out of the sky. The levee and the lines of trees along the bank would fade into the night, and the stars came out as the boat lanterns would be reflected in the water, while the lamplight from the boat fell softly and the boat became full of shadows of the night.

"As a landing was reached at night, the men would come down the gangplank with their lanterns to light the way to the shore where the boats stores were kept. Then after a brief landing the captain would call his orders from the deck and the boat would get under way again and get up full speed down the river. Then it seemed the moon would rise from the trees on the river bank, round and full above the horizon and as the boat cut its path down the river leaving a bright light in its wake, the city of Vicksburg came into view. Once again I experienced a thrill as the war torn city of historical fame , it seemed, held out its hand 5 in welcome to a son of the North. So after many years I came and fell a victim to its charms, as well as a victim to the entire outh South . My first impression of awe after seeing the canon were for the old mansions of the city. (here the belles and the deaus trod the dances) . with its high ceilings and the stately halls. Then the next thing were the lantations plantations as they stood in the days of ante-bellum.

"To this day I can see the old plantation home. There was the wide hall through the center of the house, with a few rocking chairs and tables scattered here and there. The stairs which ascended up one side and the parlor (as it was called) the bed rooms on each side of this hall where it ended at the dining room at the back with its double doors [?] opening into it, and ba back of this was the kitchen where the old Aunt Harriet, the slave who used to be there before this war which set them free, still assuming her duties as in the days of yore. Back of the dining room and kitchen was the back gallery where the cook held

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undisputed power. And hanging to the ceilings was the chandelier's with their long glass crystals which made a tinkling sound as the breezes greatly turned them round.

"It struck me as odd the southern way of calling the porches, "galleries." It was on the gallery that they entertained. It was here that the men smoked and talked the [nes?] of the day. It was the most pleasant place in the house. The birds made their nests in the eaves of the " gallerie gallerie's and the mocking bird sang his song to the gatherings here. There were other birds which to me were beautiful, typical of the south, the scarlet cardinal, [and?] the little yellow warbler called "pape" meaning the 6 Pope, for this bird was named in his honor. Often as the sun was sinking [lo?] over the trees one could see the white and blue heron as it winged its way homeward to he the swamps of Louisiana.

"The other most impressive thing to me were the "quarters" where the slaves had lived before the Civil War, they were still as they were then and the oldest slaves were still living with their "white folks" as their master with his family was called. These cabins were some distance back of the masters master's house and while still in use, were old and showed they had been built in another day. hey They were all alike, two rooms with a chimney rising at one and of the cabin. most Most of them were white-ashed and at the back had a small yard where they / could have a garden if they liked. Most of these back yards were full of flowers the caa canna , the roses, the sweet william, the cape jasmine, this latter was one I had never seen before , with its large white flower, very fragrant, and the large dark leaves. In the summer the wax-like blossoms were beautiful.

"There were the honeysuckle vines which had practically taken the old rail fences, together with the china-berry trees and the magnolia, which only grows in the south. This tree was also a wonderful and beautiful sight to me as I was not accustomed to seeing it up north. The large white flowers as they sometimes were in the very tops of the trees which grew very high in this climate.

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"I was so enthused over the beauties of this place and its climate that I almost decided to stay, but the spirit of adventure which was leading me on, again took possession of me and once more I took the boat, this time up the Mississippi river to Helena , Arkansas. 7 "From Helena I followed the course of the Arkansas river and walked to [ine?] Bluff , Arkansas, and again I viewed the results of the then late Civil War. I [pa sed?] where the Union troops and the Confederates had a battle at Clarendon , Arkansas , on White river. I could see where the timber showed the treetops had been cut off by the canon balls, also many canon and minnie balls were still embedded in the tree trunks.

"At this time the negroes had been giving trouble altho the econstruction Reconstruction days were about over, they still were undecided as to their right right's . The Freedmans Bureau had been withdrawn and the white man was again assuming control. I found many plantations which had once been prosperus not run down and in a forsaken condition, in some instances due to the fact that the owner did not return from the war and in others due to the fact that the losses incurred as a result of the war had made it impossible for the owner to regain his financial status.

"These communities still mobbed a negro if he still committed an offense they thought justified taking the law into their own hands. At the time I worked in Pine Bluff the white man and the negro did not work together in the fields or else where, always in serate separate crowds. At first this struck me as odd, but in time I assumed the same attitude as the southern man towards the negro, with this exception, that I could not understand the southern mans attitude of responsibility towards their former slaves. If the slave tried to do right the former owner gave him a crop and furished furnished him his supplies, gave him part of the crop he made and saw that he was taken care of, just as if there had been no war with 8 the slavery question invded involved . Hut But he knew ho how to handle the situation it seemed.

"After finishing my work at Pine Bluff, I went to Little Rock Arkansas. The state owned a great area of swamp land below the city [nea?] near the river, I worked for the state

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helping to ditch this land for the purpose of putting it in condition for the state to sell. The state was practicing soil conservation even then, but without Federal aid. Little Rock is a beautiful city, justly called the "city of roses" I did not see the after-effects of the Civil war here as in other places. The city received its name fomr from a little rock which juts out into the river below the city. The city is located on the Arkansas river and the boatls boats as they pass under the bridge at night make a beautiful picture.

"At the time I lived there there was no bridge and we had to cross the river on a ferry boat. This ferry was used for traffic and freight. After spending a few weeks at Little Rock I worked on a railroad which was being built from Lewisburg to Fort Smith Arkansas. I ran out of money down to fifteen cents, at Lewisburg I bought ten cents worth of crackers And five cents worth of cheese, as I was too proud to beg , I walked 70 miles and it took the greater part of two days, and the greater part of my rations on this trip was the crackers and cheese. I was trying to reach the head of the camp to secure the job as foreman but I was forced from hunger to accept work at Van Buren , Arkansas. I worked here until the company went broke and 9 the work was held up, then I went to Van Buren and worked in a brick yard thro' the summer. From there I took a stage to Fort Gibson Indian Territory. This was an old trading fort located on the Arkansas river. At this time it was used as a regular army post. The old fort stood just as in the days of the Indian traders, it was built of logs and rocks and for the windows there were small holes just high enough for a man to stand and place his gun to shoot thro' them these were called port-holes.

"There were only a few stores and houses, the only white men were those who traded with the Indians. The Territory was full of Indians who had been moved to the reservation, first there were the Cherokee tribes, further south were the Creeks, then came the Chocktaws, then the Chickasa's, these latter lived bordering on the Red River , making the four tribes which had been placed there by the government. This was called the Indian Territory until the state of Oklahoma took its name.

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"In travelling thro' the erritory Territory I found many white men had married Indian women, and among the Cherokee Indians there were many negroes who were former slaves of these Indians. he When they left their homes in the southern states they were allowed to bring their slaves with them, and so these negroes and Indians had intermarried and they inherited their land from the government the se same as the Indians. The history of the Cherokee tribe as I understand it dates back to the time they were moved from Tennessee to Arkansas, and from there to East Texas. It was to these Indians when they were in Ark, that 10 Sam Houston went to live with until he came to Texas when he vacated the governors chair in Tennessee. They had been his boy-hood friends in Tennessee, and here he found in Arkansas the sympathy and comfort he [seemed?] to have needed to start his life over.

"On my journeys thro' the Territory I walked when I did not travel by stage, the stage charged twelve cents a mile for passengers. This was in the winter of 1871 and 1872, and before the Territory was opened to the public. To the best of my memory it was in the winter of 1887 the Territory was opened to the white man to settle. At th the time I passed thro' the only whites were the soldiers and the white men who had married the Indian women, and the Indian traders.

"Some of these trading posts later on were towns, such as Limestone Gap, and McAllsiter, which was situated on Blue river. (Then there was what was claled called the Neutral strip. There was a [dis ute?] between the United States and Mexico over the boundary of Texas, and [Herrare?] and Wilkerson averted war by establishing "The [eatral?] Strip". This was between the Sabine [a d?] [theArroyo?] Hondo.)

"Most of the tribes had become civilized, they had their tril tribal dances after the custom of the whites, thro' the intermarriage of so many white men to the Indian women. The real trib tribal dances , as they were held in the days of their freedom were held only at rare intervals, such as some celebration, feast day or religions rites. They had embraced

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the once hated ways of the white's. And so "Poor Lo" as I saw him was in reality , "The Vanishing American". (To be continued).